

Establishing priorities key to long-range plan

Editor's note: This is the second in a series of articles outlining the renovation process at Willoughby Golf Club in Stuart, Fla.

By KEVIN DOWNING

STUART, Fla. — Every golf course needs a facelift every once in a while to keep pace with new turf trends or to stay in touch with member or golfer needs. No matter what changes are discussed the thought process needs to be comprehensive enough to take into consideration all levels of golfers and the eventual cost of the reconstruction programs. Assembling a document that clearly defines these goals and objectives is in effect the long-range plan for a golf club.

Most long-range plans can be coordinated to structure a program that can be implemented in a three- to five-year time frame. At Willoughby Golf Club, we chose to create a plan that could condense major projects and expenditures into a two-year window to minimize interference for the membership. Once again, since the club has experienced a great deal of consistency with the members and management, this process of planning and prioritizing truly became an enrichment program for the course. The first two green committees generated the direct feedback and this included my ongoing comments and reports suggesting potential course enhancements. We established two important areas in which to identify course adjustments:

- **Course improvements:** Any work performed on the course had to be recommended by the greens committee, approved by the board of directors and supported by the operating budget. This included tee regrassing, drainage, path repairs or rerouting, landscape changes or bunker refurbishment.

- **Course Modifications:** These changes had to be recommended to the greens chairman by either the golf course manager or the committee and approved by the board of directors. The funds for these projects came from capital budgets and included as greens modification, additional bunkering and/or substantial redesign work.

Once we developed these categories, we were able to establish priorities and focus on the goals and objectives for future projects. At this phase of the planning process we

approached the Arthur Hills design firm and had them begin the process of analyzing the course and evaluating our priority list.

Most courses should utilize a golf course architecture firm to assist in this process since the planning can be related

to updated standards in the design and construction industry. Establishing needs for architectural drawings or budget parameters can legitimize the entire project and should help the eventual approval procedures. The American Society of Golf

Course Architects provides a wonderful booklet (*Remodeling Your Golf Course*), that helps determine the usefulness of retaining a golf architect.

SELLING TO THE MEMBERSHIP

For us, cost analysis quickly became an issue in establishing

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Arthur Hills on-site with Willoughby GC's greens committee.



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Fought-Lehman

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DMB Golf, which developed and owns the club and surrounding community, recently opened a second course not too far from DC Ranch. Lehman said one of the motivations to improve DC Ranch was to prevent DMB's two properties from competing with one another. The company realized that in its current state, the course would run a distant second to the new property, Lehman said.

"If you want to be able to compete with the other clubs in the area, you have to have greens that are going to be as good, as firm and as fast as possible," he said.

Because of his touring schedule, Lehman said this project, as well as the firm's other projects — three in Arizona, one in California and two in Minnesota — are convenient for him.

"Having these projects at home is extremely convenient because I can spend three or four hours a day making sure the bunkers are being done right and I can spend the afternoon practicing," Lehman said. "The other projects work out well because I usually visit them either when I'm leaving to go to a tournament or I'm coming from a tournament. So I'm visiting those places either once a week or once every two weeks."

Lehman said he prides himself on being very involved in each project the firm takes on, which is one reason he and Fought have limited the number of their projects.

"This isn't a hobby or something I do in my spare time, this is my second career. I've been extremely involved in every project that we have done," Lehman said. "We don't do many, only enough where I feel I can continue to work on my game the way I want to."

Lehman said he got into architecture because it was something that interested him, and that the thrill he gets from watching his conceptualizations become reality matches that of sinking a long putt.

"I just love watching a guy get in a 'dozer and shape a bunker," he said. "I could sit there all day long watching them build a big bunker."

Lehman said his firm brings a unique perspective because both have been professional golfers and architects, with Fought bringing a deep knowledge of architecture as well.

"He's very skilled and proficient not only in playing but in design," Lehman said. "We have somebody in our office who understands completely all the phases of design and all the nuts and bolts, yet is a great player. That's such a nice blend, and I think that's the strength our office offers." ■

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funding requirements. This tricky phase can sometimes sink a project, so be cautious to use conservative numbers that can be justified with realistic quotations. Setting up bid specifications that will provide the best turf in a short time-frame is essential to a renovation project.

With all the basics in place, the task of selling the membership on protecting their "investment" became the main focus of the golf course management team and the greens committee.

We chose to initiate small focus group gatherings and added another series of small

general membership meetings to explain the entire process, because technical questions about turfgrasses and soil mixes cannot be absorbed by most golfers in a quick newsletter or memorandum. The ultimate communication phase of the program began with the smaller meetings which allowed members to ask intelligent questions in

an informal setting. We were able to personally address the questions and concerns of approximately 20 percent of the membership during this year-long "marketing" phase.

In the next issue of *Golf Course News*, we will focus on some of the bumps in the road we encountered and how the bidding process became the final sales tool. ■

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Ornamentals by Monrovia.

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